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Transcendence (philosophy)

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Article | Talk | Read | Edit | View history

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Contents hide

(Top)
Religious definition
Modern philosophy
Contemporary philosophy
Comparison to religious definitions
Colloquial usage
Comparison to immanence
See also
References
Bibliography
External links

In philosophy, **transcendence** is the basic ground concept from the word's literal meaning (from Latin), of climbing or going beyond, albeit with varying connotations in its different historical and cultural stages. It includes philosophies, systems, and approaches that describe the fundamental structures of being, as an ontology (theory of being), but as the framework of emergence and validation of knowledge of being. These definitions are generally grounded in reason and empirical observation and seek to provide a framework for understanding the world that is not reliant on religious beliefs or supernatural forces.[1][2][3] "Transcendental" is a word derived from the scholastic, designating the extra-categorical attributes of beings.[4][5]

Religious definition [edit]

See also: Transcendence (religion)

In religion, transcendence refers to the aspect of God's nature and power which is wholly independent of the material universe, beyond all physical laws. This is contrasted with immanence, where a god is said to be fully present in the physical world and thus accessible to creatures in various ways. In religious experience, transcendence is a state of being that has overcome the limitations of physical existence and by some definitions has also become independent of it. This is typically manifested in prayer, séance, meditation, psychedelics and paranormal "visions".

It is affirmed in various religious traditions' concept of the divine, which contrasts with the notion of a god (or, the Absolute) that exists exclusively in the perceived order (immanentism), or indistinguishable from it (pantheism). Transcendence can be attributed to the divine not only in its being, but also in its knowledge. Thus, God may transcend both the universe and knowledge (beyond the grasp of the human mind). Although transcendence is defined as the opposite of immanence, the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Some theologians and metaphysicians of various religious traditions affirm that a god is both within and beyond the universe (panentheism); in it, but not of it; simultaneously pervading it and surpassing it.

Modern philosophy [edit]

Further information: Transcendental idealism and Transcendental arguments

The *Ethics* of Baruch Spinoza used the expression "transcendental terms" (in Latin: *termini transcendentales*) to indicate concepts like Being, Thing, Something,[6] which are so general not to be included in the definitions of species, genus and category. In modern philosophy, Immanuel Kant introduced a new term, *transcendental*, thus instituting a new, third meaning. In his theory of knowledge, this concept is concerned with the condition of possibility of knowledge itself. He also opposed the term *transcendental* to the term *transcendent*, the latter meaning "that which goes beyond" (transcends) any possible knowledge of a human being.[7][8] For him *transcendental* meant knowledge about our cognitive faculty with regard to how objects are possible *a priori*. "I call all knowledge *transcendental* if it is occupied, not with objects, but with the way that we can possibly know objects even before we experience them."[9] Therefore, metaphysics, as a fundamental and universal theory, turns out to be an epistemology. Transcendental philosophy, consequently, is not considered a traditional ontological form of metaphysics.

Kant equated *transcendental* with that which is "... in respect of the subject's faculty of cognition."[10] Something is transcendental if it plays a role in the way in which the mind "constitutes" objects and makes it possible for us to experience them as objects in the first place. Ordinary knowledge is knowledge of objects; transcendental knowledge is knowledge of how it is possible for us to experience those objects as objects. This is based on Kant's acceptance of David Hume's argument that certain general features of objects (e.g. persistence, causal relationships) cannot be derived from the sense impressions we have of them. Kant argues that the mind must contribute those features and make it possible for us to experience objects as objects. In the central part of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, the "Transcendental Deduction of the Categories", Kant argues for a deep interconnection between the ability to have consciousness of self and the ability to experience a world of objects. Through a process of synthesis, the mind generates both the structure of objects and its own unity.

A metaphilosophical question discussed by many Kantian scholars is what transcendental reflection is and how transcendental reflection is itself possible. Valentin Balanovskiy shows that this is a special instrument inherent in our consciousness, something by what individuals can distinguish themselves from any other objects of reality.[11] Stephen Palmquist argues that Kant's solution to this problem is an appeal to faith.[12] For Kant, the "transcendent", as opposed to the "transcendental", is that which lies beyond what our faculty of knowledge can legitimately know. Hegel's counter-argument to Kant was that to know a boundary is also to be aware of what it bounds and as such what lies beyond it – in other words, to have already transcended it.

Contemporary philosophy [edit]

In phenomenology, the "transcendent" is that which transcends our own consciousness: that which is objective rather than only a phenomenon of consciousness. Jean-Paul Sartre also speaks of transcendence in his works. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre uses transcendence to describe the relation of the self to the object-oriented world, as well as our concrete relations with others. For Sartre, the for-itself is sometimes called a transcendence. Additionally, if the other is viewed strictly as an object, much like any other object, then the other is, for the for-itself, a transcendence-transcended. When the for-itself grasps the other in the others world, and grasps the subjectivity that the other has, it is referred to as transcending-transcendence. Thus, Sartre defines relations with others in terms of transcendence.[13]

Contemporary transcendental philosophy is developed by German philosopher Harald Holz with a holistic approach. Holz distanced transcendental philosophy from the convergence of neo-Kantianism. He critically discussed transcendental pragmatism and the relation between transcendental philosophy, neo-empiricism, and so-called postmodernism.

Comparison to religious definitions [edit]

Philosophical definitions of transcendence often emphasize the idea of going beyond or exceeding the limits of human experience, and may focus on concepts such as rationality, consciousness, or the nature of reality. These definitions are generally grounded in reason and empirical observation, and seek to provide a framework for understanding the world that is not reliant on religious beliefs or supernatural forces. Religious definitions of transcendence, on the other hand, often emphasize the idea of connecting with something beyond the self or the material world, and may focus on concepts such as God, the soul, or the afterlife. These definitions are often grounded in faith and revelation, and may be seen as offering a way to access a higher or divine reality that cannot be directly observed or explained through reason alone.

While there may be some overlap between these two definitions of transcendence, they are ultimately grounded in different epistemological frameworks and ways of understanding the world. Therefore, the scope derived from the philosophical definition of transcendence could contain the scope derived from the religious definition of transcendence, but not vice versa. This is because the philosophical definition of transcendence is broader and more abstract than the religious definition, which is more specific and focused on a particular faith or belief system.[12][13]

Colloquial usage [edit]

In everyday language, "transcendence" means "going beyond", and "self-transcendence" means going beyond a prior form or state of oneself. Mystical experience is thought of as a particularly advanced state of self-transcendence, in which the sense of a separate self is abandoned. "Self-transcendence" is believed to be psychometrically measurable, and (at least partially) inherited, and has been incorporated as a personality dimension in the Temperament and Character Inventory.[14] The discovery of this is described in the book *The God Gene* by Dean Hamer, although this has been criticized by commentators such as Carl Zimmer.

Comparison to immanence [edit]

The doctrine or theory of immanence holds that the divine encompasses or is manifested in the material world. It is held by some philosophical and metaphysical theories of divine presence. Immanence is usually applied in monotheistic, pantheistic, pandeistic, or panentheistic faiths to suggest that the spiritual world permeates the mundane. It is often contrasted with theories of transcendence, in which the divine is seen to be outside the material world.[15]

See also [edit]

- God gene
- *Ignoramus et ignorabimus*
- Immanence
- Maslow's hierarchy of needs
- Materialism
- Meta
- Transcendental empiricism
- Transcendental hermeneutic phenomenology
- Transcendental humanism
- Transcendental materialism
- Transcendental Meditation
- Transcendental naturalism
- Transcendental nihilism
- Transcendental nominalism
- Transcendental realism
- Transcendental Thomism
- Transcendentalism
- Transcendentals
- *Tzimtzum*, the traditional kabbalistic understanding

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5. ^ "CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: Transcendentalism". *www.newadvent.org*. Retrieved 25 September 2022.
6. ^ "Baruch Spinoza's Ethics, Part, II, Proposition 40, Scholium 1". (in Latin and English)
7. ^ cf. *Critique of Pure Reason* or *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*
8. ^ In *Parerga and Paralipomena*, Volume 2, Chapter 10, § 141, Schopenhauer presented the difference between transcendent and immanent in the form of a dialogue. The dialogists were Thrasymachos, a student of German Idealism, and Philalethes, a Kantian Transcendental Idealist. "Thrasymachos: … I know these expressions from my professor, but only as predicates of a loving God with whom his philosophy was exclusively concerned, as is only right and proper. Namely, if God is situated within the world, he is immanent; if he resides somewhere outside, he is transcendent. … Philalethes: Transcendent knowledge is that which, going beyond all possibility of experience, strives to determine the nature of things as they are in themselves; immanent knowledge, on the other hand, is that which keeps within the bounds of the possibility of experience, but thus can speak only of phenomena." In Schopenhauer's German: "Thrasymachos: … Mir sind diese Ausdrücke zwar auch bekannt, von meinem Professor her, aber nur als Prädikate des lieben Gottes, mit welchem seine Philosophie, wie sich das eben auch geziemt, es ausschließlich zu tun hatte. Steckt nämlich der in der Welt drinne, so ist er immanent: sitzt er aber irgendwo draußen, so ist er transzendent. … Philalethes: Transzendente Erkenntnis ist die, welche, über alle Möglichkeit der Erfahrung hinausgehend, das Wesen der Dinge, wie sie an sich selbst sind, zu bestimmen anstrebt; immanente Erkenntnis hingegen die, welche sich innerhalb der Schranken der Möglichkeit der Erfahrung hält, daher aber auch nur von Erscheinungen reden kann."
9. ^ "I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our mode of cognition of objects insofar as this is to be possible *a priori*. A **system** of such concepts would be called **transcendental philosophy**." Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, Cambridge University Press, 1998. p. 149 (B25)
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